

When to Call the Doctor

This section provides general information about conditions that warrant calling the doctor. Every person is different; use your best judgment. You know your loved one better than anyone. If you are worried about his/her condition, let your doctor know. Follow the advice that your doctor has given you regarding when to call for medical help.

Seizures

Call **911** for the following reasons:

- First time seizure
- Seizure that lasts more than two minutes
- The person stops breathing during/after the seizure
- There is a change in alertness (decreased ability to respond) even if it occurs a couple of hours after the seizure
- The person has many seizures - one right after another

The doctor should always be called if a seizure happens. The above situations are reasons for calling on an emergency basis. If a person has a history of seizures, is on medicines for seizures and does not have an emergency issue (listed above), then the doctor should be called instead of using **911**.

Fever

Call the doctor for new onset of fever. Try to figure out the cause of the fever so you can give the doctor a good picture of what is happening to your loved one. For example, is your loved one coughing up colored phlegm or is his urine cloudy or bloody? Is your loved one having problems with vomiting or diarrhea? Notice how long the fever has been present and whether or not it seems to be relieved with Tylenol.

Breathing

Call **911** if the person is having trouble breathing, cannot stop coughing or is having shallow breaths. If your loved one has started a mild cough or is coughing up phlegm, notify your doctor during regular office hours. Notice if a fever is present and note the color of the phlegm. Brown, green, yellow or blood tinged phlegm could mean that an infection is starting. Call your doctor at the first signs of infection.

Thinking and Behavior

Call the doctor if you see changes in your loved one's level of alertness. It is important to let the doctor know if your loved one is more drowsy than usual. Also, let your doctor know if your loved one shows signs of getting better. Some signs of improvement include: more awareness of surroundings, following commands consistently, trying to speak or even acting agitated during the day. These issues can be mentioned during regular office hours. If you think your loved one is having an emergency or gets so agitated that he is dangerous to others or himself, then call **911**.

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Medicines

Call your doctor during regular office hours for medicine refills. Call when you have about a one-week supply of medicine left so you do not run out before the prescription can be filled. Make appointments with your doctor during regular office hours for routine blood work. For example, some medicines, like Tegretol, Dilantin and Coumadin require blood tests to know the drug is working safely in the body.

Never start taking new medicines or stop medicines without first talking to the doctor. This includes over-the-counter medicines, herbal remedies and vitamins. If you notice side effects from the medicines, let your doctor know. If there is a serious reaction, such as difficulty breathing, call **911** for immediate help.

Bowel

Call the doctor during regular office hours for constipation (no stool for three days) or for diarrhea that lasts longer than 24 hours. If there is a large amount of blood in the stool, black stool or blood leaking from the rectum call your doctor on a more urgent basis. Sometimes small specks of blood are in the stool as a result of hemorrhoids. This is not an emergency, so the doctor could be made aware of this during regular hours.

If your loved one is having high residuals from tube feedings, you should also let the doctor know. If residuals are high during the night, hold the tube feeding and call the doctor in the morning. Position your loved one at about 30 degrees in the bed (raise the head of the bed). Do not rest the individual flat on the bed when high residuals are present.

Before you leave the hospital, ask the doctor what your loved one's residuals should be and what amount would be considered "too high." This will help you know when you should hold the feeding.

Bladder

Call the doctor if you suspect a urinary tract infection (UTI). Signs of infection include cloudy and odorous urine, fever and pain with urination and/or blood-tinged urine. Also, let the doctor know if there is very little urinary output. Usually, a UTI is treated during regular office hours.

Splints and Casts

Let your doctor know if your loved one's casts or splints are fitting poorly and if they are causing red spots, pinched areas or swelling. Pay attention to increases in muscle tone or spasms. These problems could be phoned in during regular hours.

Swelling

If you notice that there is redness, swelling, pain and excess warmth to an extremity (leg or arm), call the doctor on a more urgent basis. Do not massage the area. Keep it as still as possible. Keep the person in bed

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until the doctor gives you advice. This condition does not usually require a **911** call, but the doctor should be made aware as soon as possible.

General swelling of a leg or arm without redness, pain and excess warmth is usually not an urgent problem. Tell the doctor about simple swelling during regular office hours.

Coumadin

On Coumadin? Call the doctor on an urgent basis for any bleeding problems or large areas of bruising. Look for bleeding in:

- Urine
- Phlegm
- Stool
- Saliva
- Excess bleeding from small cuts or scrapes
- Excess bleeding during menstrual period
- Gums (when brushing the teeth or eating)